

**CLAIMS**

1. A method of carrying out a transaction in goods and/or services between a customer and a merchant in a trading system including a communications network connecting a plurality of merchant computers; a plurality of customer computers; and at least one broker computer comprising the steps of:-
  - 5 the customer computer sending a list of preferred merchants to the broker computer;
  - 10 the customer computer sending an initial trading request to the broker computer;
  - 15 the broker computer sending the initial trading request to each merchant computer with a quotation request;
  - 20 the merchant computer sending the quotation back to the broker computer;
  - 25 the broker computer preparing a proposed trading request from the quotations for the preferred merchants; and
  - the broker computer downloading the proposed trading request to the customer.
2. A method as claimed in claim 1, in which:-
  - 30 the customer computer receives the proposed trading request;
  - the customer computer displays the proposed trading request;
  - the customer computer prepares a transaction list from the proposed trading request; and

the customer computer sends the relevant portion of the transaction list to the merchant computer.

3. A method as claimed in claim 1, in which:-

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the customer computer receives the proposed trading request;

the customer computer displays the proposed trading request;

10 the customer computer prepares a transaction list from the proposed trading request;

the customer computer sends the transaction list to the broker computer; and

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the broker computer transmits the relevant portion of the transaction list to the merchant computer.

4. A method as claimed in claim 1, in which:-

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the customer computer receives the proposed trading request;

the customer computer displays the proposed trading request;

25 the customer computer prepares a transaction list from the proposed trading request;

the customer computer sends the transaction list to the broker computer;

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the broker computer transmits the relevant portion of the transaction list to the merchant computer;

the merchant computer transmits acceptance of the order, delivery

details and a payment request to the broker computer;

the broker computer confirms completion to the merchant computer;  
and

5 the broker computer confirms payment to the merchant computer.

10 5. A method as claimed in claim 4, in which, prior to transmitting acceptance of the order, the broker computer transmits merchant computer acceptance, delivery and payment details to the customer computer and on receiving confirmation from the customer computer, transmits the acceptance to the merchant computer.

15 6. A method as claimed in claim 1, in which:-

15 the customer computer receives the proposed trading request;

20 the customer computer displays the proposed trading request;

25 the customer computer prepares a transaction list from the proposed trading request;

the customer computer sends the transaction list to the broker computer;

30 the broker computer transmits the relevant portion of the transaction list to the merchant computer;

the merchant computer transmits acceptance of the order, delivery details and a payment request to the broker computer;

the broker computer confirms completion to the merchant computer;

the broker computer confirms payment with the customer computer;

and

the broker computer confirms payment to the merchant computer.

5 7. A method as claimed in claim 6, in which prior to transmitting acceptance of the order, the broker computer transmits merchant computer acceptance, delivery and payment details to the customer computer and on receiving confirmation from the customer computer, transmits the acceptance to the merchant computer.

10 8. A method of carrying out a transaction in goods and/or services between a customer and a merchant in a trading system including a communications network connecting a plurality of merchant computers; a plurality of customer computers; and at least one broker computer comprising the steps of:-

15 the customer computer downloads the list of preferred merchants to the broker computer; and the broker computer stores, in a merchant database, a list of preferred merchants for each customer computer; and on the customer computer desired to carry out a transaction, the steps are performed of:-

20 the customer computer sending a list of preferred merchants to the broker computer;

25 the customer computer sending an initial trading request to the broker computer;

30 the broker computer sending the initial trading request to each merchant computer with a quotation request;

35 the merchant computer sending the quotation back to the broker computer;

40 the broker computer preparing a proposed trading request from

the quotations for the preferred merchants; and

the broker computer downloading the proposed trading request to the customer.

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9. A method as claimed in claim 8, in which:-

the customer computer receives the proposed trading request;

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the customer computer displays the proposed trading request;

the customer computer prepares a transaction list from the proposed trading request; and

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the customer computer sends the relevant portion of the transaction list to the merchant computer.

10. A method as claimed in claim 8, in which:-

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the customer computer receives the proposed trading request;

the customer computer displays the proposed trading request;

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the customer computer prepares a transaction list from the proposed trading request;

the customer computer sends the transaction list to the broker computer; and

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the broker computer transmits the relevant portion of the transaction list to the merchant computer.

11. A method as claimed in claim 8, in which:-

the customer computer receives the proposed trading request;

the customer computer displays the proposed trading request;

5           the customer computer prepares a transaction list from the proposed trading request;

the customer computer sends the transaction list to the broker computer;

10           the broker computer transmits the relevant portion of the transaction list to the merchant computer;

15           the merchant computer transmits acceptance of the order, delivery details and a payment request to the broker computer;

the broker computer confirms completion to the merchant computer;  
and

20           the broker computer confirms payment to the merchant computer.

12.          A method as claimed in claim 11, in which prior to transmitting acceptance of the order, the broker computer transmits merchant computer acceptance, delivery and payment details to the customer computer and on receiving confirmation from the customer computer, transmits the acceptance to the merchant computer.

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13.          A method as claimed in claim 8, in which:-

30           the customer computer receives the proposed trading request;

the customer computer displays the proposed trading request;

the customer computer prepares a transaction list from the proposed

trading request;

the customer computer sends the transaction list to the broker computer;

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the broker computer transmits the relevant portion of the transaction list to the merchant computer;

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the merchant computer transmits acceptance of the order, delivery details and a payment request to the broker computer;

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the broker computer confirms completion to the merchant computer;

the broker computer confirms payment with the customer computer; and

the broker computer confirms payment to the merchant computer.

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14. A method as claimed in claim 13, in which prior to transmitting acceptance of the order, the broker computer transmits merchant computer acceptance, delivery and payment details to the customer computer and on receiving confirmation from the customer computer, transmits the acceptance to the merchant computer.

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15. A method as claimed in claim 8, in which the preferred merchants are stored in order of customer preference.

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16. A method as claimed in claim 15, in which the broker computer prepares the proposed trading request having regard to pre-established rules agreed with the customer.

17. A broker computer in a trading system comprising a communications network connecting a plurality of merchant computers and a plurality of customer computers comprising:-

means for receiving an initial trading request from a customer computer;

5 means for sending the initial trading request to one or more merchant computers with a quotation request;

means for receiving quotations from the merchant computer;

10 means for preparing a proposed trading request from the quotations; and

means for downloading the proposed trading request to the customer computer.

15 18. A computer program comprising program instructions which when loaded into a computer, constitute the means of claim 17.

19. A computer program as claimed in claim 18, embodied in a record medium.

20 20. A computer program as claimed in claim 18, embodied in a computer memory.

21. A computer program as claimed in claim 18, embodied in a read only memory.

25 22. A computer program as claimed in claim 18, carried on an electrical carrier signal.

30 23. A broker computer as claimed in claim 17, comprising:-

means for storing in a merchant database, a list of preferred merchants for each customer;

means for retrieving the list of preferred merchants on receiving the initial trading request; and

5 means for sending the quotation request to the preferred merchant computers.

24. A computer program comprising program instructions which when loaded into a computer, constitute the means of claim 23.

10 25. A broker computer as claimed in claim 17, comprising:-

means for receiving a transaction list from a customer computer; and

15 means for using the transaction list to complete the transaction with the merchant computer for the customer computer.

26. A computer program comprising program instructions which when loaded into a computer, constitute the means of claim 25.

20 27. A broker computer as claimed in claim 25, comprising:-

means for storing in a merchant database, a list of preferred merchants for each customer;

25 means for retrieving the list of preferred merchants on receiving the initial trading request; and

means for sending the quotation request to the preferred merchant computers.

30 28. A customer computer for use in a trading system comprising a communications network connecting a broker computer and a plurality of merchant computers comprising:-

means for downloading an initial trading request to the broker computer with a quotation request;

5 means, on receiving the quotation request as a proposed trading request from the broker computer, to prepare a transaction list;

means for sending the transaction list to the broker computer; and

means for completing the transaction.

10 29. A computer program comprising program instructions which when loaded into a computer, constitute the means of claim 28.

15 30. A computer program as claimed in claim 29, embodied in a record medium.

31. A computer program as claimed in claim 29, embodied in a computer memory.

32. A computer program as claimed in claim 29, embodied in a read only memory.

20 33. A computer program as claimed in claim 29, carried on an electrical carrier signal.

25 34. A customer computer as claimed in claim 28, comprising:-

means for storing in a merchant database, a list of preferred merchants for each customer;

30 means for retrieving the list of preferred merchants on receiving the initial trading request; and

means for sending the quotation request to the preferred merchant computers.

35. A computer program comprising program instructions which when loaded into a computer, constitute the means of claim 34.

5 36. A customer computer as claimed in claim 28, comprising:-

means for receiving a transaction list from a customer computer; and

means for using the transaction list to complete the transaction with

10 the merchant computer for the customer computer.

37. A computer program comprising program instructions which when loaded into a computer, constitute the means of claim 36.

15 38. A customer computer as claimed in claim 36, comprising:-

means for storing in a merchant database, a list of preferred merchants for each customer;

20 means for retrieving the list of preferred merchants on receiving the initial trading request; and

means for sending the quotation request to the preferred merchant computers.